



NEBRASKA CHIEF JUSTICE MICHAEL HEAVICAN (left) and Holt County District Judge Alan Brodbeck (right) preparing to make their opening comments during the informal questions and answers session at the Holt County District Courtroom in O'Neill.

Nebraska Chief Justice Comes To Visit Holt County District Court

Chief Justice Michael Heavican, of the Nebraska Supreme Court, and Janice K. Walker, State Court Administrator were in O'Neill at the District Court Thursday August 12.

Judge Alan Brodbeck, other regional Judges, County Attorneys, Public Defenders, Private Attorneys, and personnel from the Department of Social Services were also in attendance. Thirty some people discussed the positive and negative attributes and better communications between the members of the Department of Social Services and the courts in different counties. Michael Heavican commented that how we treat kids in court will help them to become better citizens later in life.

An advantage for rural areas is that all individuals involved have better knowledge of who the parents, children and persons are, which makes it easier for law enforcement officers, lawyers and others to work together very well.

The Chief Justice asked Judge Brodbeck what changes have been accomplished to help improve the district court's procedure for parents and most importantly for the child involved in the court appearance. Before a hearing begins, Judge Brodbeck explained, that a video is shown to the parents telling them of their rights.

One of the major topics mentioned most frequently, is that all parties presiding at a hearing have only one thought - Do what is in the best interest of the child!

Another aspect is that teams are set up between the Social Services Department and law enforcement. These teams have regular meetings.

Tom Herzog, Holt County Attorney, said that the whole outlook of the supreme court has improved concerning the needs of the child.

Truancy was another topic discussed; some individuals suggested this should be tied more to juvenile court.

The Chief Justice pointed out that he and Janice Walker, State Court Administrator, meet frequently with the Department of Education.

There was further discussion about the need for better communication between Health and Human Services and the Boys and Girls Home of Nebraska.

It was a general consensus that a delicate balance exists between keeping a child at home or keeping a child away from home too long.

The Chief Justice asked Judge Brodbeck his thoughts on whether a child should be present in court. Judge Brodbeck responded that in his court, he decides that on a case by case basis.

Overall, the discussion stressed the importance of all parties working for solutions that benefit the youngsters.